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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4379
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 8043
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 7046
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2643
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8624
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4556
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000181

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION COMMISSION CONFIRMS OBSERVER ACCESS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Officials at the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) confirmed there were no ECP restrictions on the activities of foreign or domestic election observers. Observers could pay unannounced visits to polling stations; all the ECP asked was that observers notify district officials so that proper security could be arranged. The ECP Commission would soon issue statements urging women to vote in tribal areas and condemning a recent government political party advertisement. They assured us there would be no further delay in elections; the ECP was organizing additional security for areas deemed sensitive. We hope these assurances will satisfy the concern about the International Republican Institute and enable them to recommit to the IRI Election Monitoring mission. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Polcouns and USAID Democracy Officer met January 11 with Elections Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Secretary Kunwar Dilshad and Joint Secretary Jan Wahidi to discuss current election plans.

Foreign Monitors

¶3. (SBU) Dilshad and Wahidi confirmed that there were no ECP restrictions on foreign election observers. They said that the ECP guidelines only call for observers to advise the district election officials so that appropriate security measures can be taken. This does not restrict the ability of observers to make unannounced visits to polling stations. Observers would be allowed to see every facet of the process, including the counting of the ballots and reporting results up the chain. Wahidi said he had just met with the European Commission and had given them the same assurances about access for monitors. Dilshad regretted that he had been misquoted in a press article indicating that there were restrictions on observers. They agreed to our request that the ECP issue a statement clarifying access for observers and said they would try to issue this on January 12.

Domestic Monitors/Press

¶4. (SBU) Wahidi said that domestic observers would be treated the same as international observers. The ECP would issue the foreign press with credentials to see and report on the entire process; these credentials applied country-wide. Domestic media had their own press credentials and could similarly report on the process.

Polling Stations

¶5. (SBU) Wahidi said the full list of polling places had been published in the Pakistani Gazette and was available through the ECP's district offices. The process of publishing this list on the ECP's website was underway and would be finished soon.

Security -----

¶6. (SBU) Dilshad had just returned from a visit to Karachi, where he organized substitute ECP offices for those that had been burned down during the violence after Benazir Bhutto's assassination. These new offices were being supplied with phones, computers and faxes as needed. He reported that 12,000 translucent ballot boxes had been destroyed during the violence.

¶7. (SBU) As of now, Dilshad said the ECP plans to hold elections everywhere on February 18. Additional Army and police security would be required in Swat, Hangu, Shangla, North Waziristan and Kurram Agency. He indicated parts of Balochistan were also problematic.

Participation of Women -----

¶8. (SBU) The Election Commissioner would soon be issuing a statement urging that women in the tribal areas be encouraged to vote; if women were not given adequate opportunities to vote, the ECP might void the election in those districts.

Opposition Concerns -----

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¶9. (SBU) Polcouns noted that opposition political parties feared that the elections might be postponed again. Dilshad reiterated what President Musharraf told Codel Lieberman on January 9 -- the elections would proceed as scheduled on February 18.

¶10. (SBU) Asked about the ECP response to allegations of rigging by political parties, Dilshad said that the ECP had received the Pakistan People's Party brief on rigging and was studying it. With IFES support, the ECP had improved procedures for registering and responding to complaints. Often, however, Dilshad said that the parties do not follow up their allegations with requested evidence. The Commission would soon issue a statement condemning the recent Pakistan Muslim League party advertisement that made unfair accusations against another party. The Commissioner was studying opposition complaints about how nazims (mayors) in the Punjab were using government resources to campaign for the Pakistan Muslim League party.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: We hope these assurances will satisfy the concern of the International Republican Institute and enable it to recommit to the IRI Election Monitoring mission. MFA separately assured Polcouns they will expedite visas for long- and short-term IRI elections personnel.

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